

PREPARE YOUR SHEEP FOR SHEARING

Preparing your flock properly will help ensure a successful harvesting of your sheep's wool. Planning is the key. Here we provide some key points to consider prior to shearing.



Manage your flock to ensure the sheep are kept dry, not scouring and not stressed by excessive yarding and handling immediately prior to shearing.

1. Shear at the 'optimum' time of year

This timing should suit:

- the physiological state of the sheep, ie during the middle third (trimester) of pregnancy or prior to joining
- likely feed available and body condition (CS 2.0 minimum)
- optimal tensile strength and position of break
- likely seasonal conditions, including allowing enough time after the dag season for additional wool growth, so the dags have lifted off the skin and there is enough room for a handpiece to get between the dags and skin.

As much as possible, avoid wet and windy weather in particular or plan for the provision of extra rations (from the paddock, silo or shed) and shelter (topography, scrub, bush or tall grass) mainly from the wind. The combination of wind and rain – wind chill – is the big concern. Wind chill can happen even in summer. The danger

is in the change in body temperature and the sheep's body reserves, and capacity to deal with the speed of these changes.

2. Always curfew sheep prior to shearing

The required time is set by their physiological state: pregnant, non-pregnant, lactating, age, etc. 'Full' sheep are harder to handle and keep comfortable and relaxed during shearing.

3. Sheep shorn annually should always be crutched prior to shearing

How long before shearing to crutch is determined by many factors:

- Crutching closer to shearing is generally better, but you must consider your flock's annual cycle of sheep husbandry.



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- Combine crutching with other/another husbandry operation – this will reduce handling and time-off-feed.
- Crutch **after** (or immediately **prior** to) likely periods of feed growth – this will help prevent dags and stain.
- Crutching just prior to a fly risk period will provide good protection from flystrike for 4 – 6 weeks.
- Consider the timing of lambing to ensure the lambs' access to the udder.

4. Sheep shorn more frequently than annually (6 or 8 monthly) will often have little or no requirement for crutching, at least on a whole flock or mob basis

However, be prepared to crutch, bung-hole or part shear individual animals when they:

- are excessively muddy
- are flystruck and/or excessively stained
- have other fleece damage or derangement which should be kept **outside** the shed; or
- are not mulesed.

Remember, whatever comes into your shed could quite easily end up in a wool bin/bale!

5. Handle sheep to minimise stress at all times

- Follow the principles of low stress stock handling.
- Consider the design of your facilities, including shade in waiting/storage areas.
- Consider the sheep's needs for water and rest during movement – to the shed, through the shed, and back to the paddock.
- Provide water post shearing and avoid leaving freshly shorn sheep overnight in the yards.
- Remember that curfew and emptying out is an important part of minimising **total** stress, so 'recovery' from this process – ie 'filling up' again – is an equally important part. Plan for it!

- Remember the sheep's daily energy requirement and allow to have to 'top up' under some circumstances. Grain is a high content source of energy, but has a much higher associated risk of acidosis (grain poisoning), whereas hay is much safer and high-quality hays (eg lucerne and medics) are safe and provide energy over a longer period of time.

6. Shearing cuts and related accidents are a minor but unfortunate part of wool harvesting

- Plan to and do all that you can to **prevent** their occurrence.
- Breed sheep with less neck, body and breech wrinkle.
- Plan for treatment of cuts and other injuries, and recovery of injured animals – and hope you never need to enact your plan(s).



The shearing shed safety program *SafeSheds* includes a best practice guide and checklist – see www.wool.com/safe-sheds

7. Wool harvesting is as much about the people – shearers, woolhandlers and shed/yard staff – as it is about the sheep.

- Talk to your contractor early (if you use one) to secure quality shearers.
- AWI conducts shearer training for both new and experienced shearers.
- Provide high quality staff facilities. Refer to the shearing shed safety program *SafeSheds*, which includes a best practice guide and checklist, available at www.wool.com/safe-sheds.
- Communicate clearly and frequently with staff.
- Provide an environment in which fast, efficient and effective work is as easy as possible.
- Minimise stress on the people!
- Remember shearing is a shared responsibility. Ensure you have the *Safety and Sheep Welfare* code of conduct poster displayed in your shed. The poster can help woolgrowers set standards for their whole shearing team. It is available to download at www.wool.com/safe-sheds.